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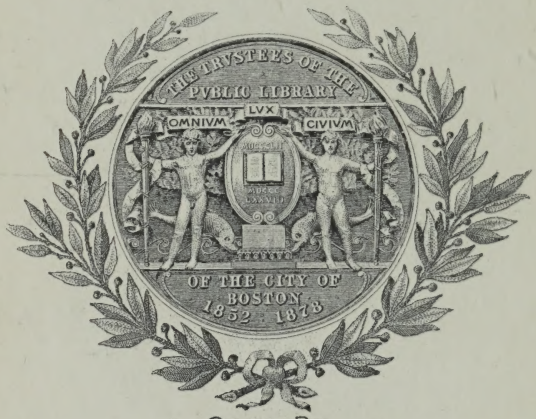

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N. N. Kimball Esq.

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MR. STOW'S DISCOURSE

ON

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS.

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VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS—THEIR USE AND ABUSE.

A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED IN THE MEETING HOUSE

OF THE

SECOND BAPTIST SOCIETY,

IN BALDWIN PLACE,

THANKSGIVING-DAY,

November 30, 1837.

BY BARON STOW.

BOSTON:
GOULD, KENDALL & LINCOLN.
1837.

BOSTON, December 14, 1837.

Rev. Sir,—

At a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Second Baptist Society, held on the 2d inst., the undersigned were appointed a Sub-Committee in their behalf to present you their thanks for the interesting discourse delivered by you before said Society on the late Anniversary of Thanksgiving, and to solicit a copy for publication. Permit us, in rendering this service, to assure you of our united desire that the request may not be denied.

Very respectfully, &c.

NATHAN GURNEY,
DAVID W. HORTON.

REV. BARON STOW.

BOSTON, December 15, 1837.

Gentlemen,—

The manuscript of the Discourse which you solicit for publication is at your disposal, with the single condition, that you will cause to be printed only a sufficient number of copies to supply the demand of the Church and Congregation of which I have the honor to be the Pastor.

With great respect,
I am, Gentlemen,
Your obedient servant,
BARON STOW.

TO THE HON. NATHAN GURNEY, AND
DAVID W. HORTON, ESQ.

Srum 546078
70883
H. C. Kimball, Esq
Accept. Oct. 28, 1865.

DISCOURSE.

"CONSIDER OF IT, TAKE ADVICE, AND SPEAK YOUR MINDS."
Judges xix. 30.

THE successive periods into which it is customary to divide the history of the civilized world, are distinguished each by some unambiguous peculiarity which gives to the age its distinctive character, modifies the fortunes of nations, throws forward the names of obscure individuals into prominent notoriety, and developes new aspects in the ever-varying permutations of human nature. At one period, this peculiarity consists in the selection and constant exhibition of some truth, which, in association with other and kindred truths, is relatively important, but which, in its unnatural separation from the system of truths to which it belongs, ceases to be valuable, and conduces only to practical absurdity. At another period, the reigning notion is a fallacy skilfully devised, and deeply laid in the perverseness of the popular mind, where, undetected, except by the voiceless few, it poisons the fountains of thought and feeling, and extensively damages the public morals. At another time, some novel theory, including a plausible mixture of both truth and error, becomes a topic of absorbing interest, gathers around it the sympathies and the intellect of the multitude, maintains its hold tenaciously of the public mind until it has fixed its impress upon the politics, the philosophy, and the theology of the age, and then relaxes its grasp, and retires, to

give place to some other and perhaps antagonist theory that shall be welcomed with the same enthusiasm, awaken equally intense interest, and elaborate with similar success its own peculiar modifications, social, intellectual, and religious.

A leading characteristic of our own times is the employment of Voluntary Associations as instruments of Power. The men of other days have not been wholly ignorant of this species of agency, as suited to the accomplishment of purposes both blameworthy and commendable; and occasionally have they broken away from strong restraints, and availed themselves of its advantages. Till within the last half century, however, it has seldom been resorted to, except for the accumulation of brute force to repel aggression, or press forward the bloody wheels of revolution. It was reserved for the present age to consecrate it to beneficent ends, and to employ it as a grand instrument not only of physical but of moral efficiency in the noble enterprize of the world's improvement. That it may be perverted and abused, no one will deny; but its utility, when judiciously appropriated, has been sufficiently tested to justify a conclusion in its favor; and in accordance with this conclusion is the uttered conviction, not only of the unreflecting throng, but of the prudent, the sagacious, the experienced.

Many public objects and humane undertakings, from their nature and magnitude, require the consent and co-operation of numbers. How otherwise will you furnish a locomotive world with facilities for rapid intercommunication—facilities that almost annihilate space, and bring into near neighborhood distant zones and hemispheres? By what other than combined agency will institutions of learning be founded and suitably endowed; or prevalent and deep-rooted vices be suppressed; or the sacred Scriptures be published and circulated in all languages; or the bewildered and besotted nations be supplied with living Christian teachers?

The beneficent effectiveness of some associations will

sustain an appeal to facts. In England, the Society for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade wrought immense changes, both in public opinion and in the policy of the government, and, with no carnal weapons, accomplished bloodlessly the most magnificent results. Its doctrines, which in the beginning were derided and scorned, have now become acknowledged principles, and seated themselves in the conscience of the civilized world. Having secured one victory, and so far honored the claims of outraged justice and humanity, the same magnanimous spirits rallied their moral forces for a deadly onset upon the system of colonial slavery, and after passing through a tempest of obloquy, and breasting opposition before which any thing less sturdy than intelligent principle would have faltered and retreated, they gloriously triumphed,—and triumphed because they moved with concert in unbroken phalanx. Throughout that mighty realm, almost girding the circumference of the globe—a realm upon which the sun never sets, there breathes not, with the permission of government, a single slave. May God in mercy hasten the time when the same can be said of our favored Republic.

In our own country, this mode of moral action has given a specimen of its power in what is usually denominated the Temperance Reform. A most inveterate and pestilent evil was working havock and death through the length and breadth of the land, and for its expulsion the friends of sobriety, associated by thousands and tens of thousands, and their voices, lifted up in unison, became as "the sound of many waters," and the condensed rebuke which they brought to bear upon this great national vice soon acquired a majesty before whose resistless pressure it was compelled to recede. Changes of signal utility have been every where effected, in town and in country, on the land and on the sea; and, whatever may be the prejudiced opinions of the sensual and avaricious, all the wise and the good in Christendom are agreed that, in this department, associations have produced incalculable benefit.

Under institutions like ours, benevolent enterprizes, of any magnitude are necessarily dependent upon voluntary organizations. Religious sects are here placed, as Heaven grant they may ever remain, on perfect equality in respect to rights and immunities, and, *as such*, can expect no special legislative patronage. The State extends to them all alike the requisite civil protection, and wisely leaves them to sustain their respective systems in their own way, and to find their own level in the scale of intellectual and moral worthiness. The interests of education, above the range of the common school system, are now so generally identified with sectarian organizations, that they have ceased to anticipate much from legislative generosity. Perhaps for the completeness of our Republican experiment, it is better that such claims should be referred to the spontaneous benevolence and patriotism of individuals, who may unite in accordance with the law of affinity, and combine their resources for the execution of such purposes as they may severally prefer. But, apart from all theories, such is the settled policy of government; and if American citizens would not be recreant to duty, or leave important objects unaccomplished, they must avail themselves of this species of power. Besides, property is among us so generally distributed that individual wealth is seldom adequate to the achievement of necessary or desirable results, and from the nature of the case combination becomes indispensable.

The practical operation of the principle is unquestionably attended by incidental advantages of some consideration. Incentives to activity are thence supplied, and the natural indolence of man is overcome; the sympathies are touched, and generous feelings awakened; selfishness is counteracted, and liberality promoted; and in many instances the social tendencies are developed and disciplined. Fountains of benevolence, ice-bound or pent in the rock, have, by this instrumentality, been opened, and made, as by the rod of a Moses, to pour forth generous streams for the refreshing of the way-worn and weary.

But I have another purpose, at this time, than to pronounce the eulogy of Voluntary Associations. Their utility as instruments of Power is sufficiently appreciated, and needs no commendation. They cannot be spared, and no considerate friend of his race can desire their suppression. But it cannot be denied that their action is attended with peculiar perils, and therefore they require of all the discreet and prudent, an unslumbering vigilance, lest their injurious issues should countervail their beneficial results. Some of the more important of these dangers I propose to designate; and that, not for the purpose of disparaging the Associations themselves, but solely for the sake of guarding against their abuse.

1. *There is danger, lest, by extravagant use, the legitimate object of Voluntary Associations shall be defeated.*

The misfortune of the times is, that no principle, no theory, no mode of useful action can be for a long period confined within its appropriate limits. No sooner is it discovered to be practically efficacious, than it is detached from its proper connexion, where it is rationally restricted by the modifying force of other principles, and urged upon the credulity of the million as the universal remedy for all evil, the sovereign agent of all good. The temporary effect is, popularity without bounds; the ultimate issue, rejection, if not execration. Not accomplishing all that it promises, and often followed by a train of injurious consequences, it gradually loses its hold on the public confidence, and either passes into disuse, or transmigrates into another form, and comes up under a new name, challenging a second trial.

From this source the credit and utility of Voluntary Associations are in special jeopardy. Having witnessed their power in a few memorable instances, their admirers have indulged the empirical conceit of their universal availability, and, by excessive use, are in danger of abusing them to their destruction. The propensity is, to apply this specific

form of agency to all subjects indiscriminately—to those of questionable importance, as well as to those of acknowledged and permanent consideration. An object strikes a well-meaning, but perhaps inconsiderate individual, as requiring attention. It occupies his musings by day and by night, and magnifies as he contemplates it, spreading over the field of his vision, and soon assumes dimensions that persuade him of its paramount demand upon his time and resources. His mind was never made a non-conductor, and its fervor, gratuitously communicated to surrounding mind, kindles in a hundred bosoms corresponding emotions. The result is an Association, with its corps of titled functionaries, its agents circulating through the land, scattering "light" and collecting money, and in the issue, with its press and a luminous weekly, piercing the darkness of Church and State with its new-found radiance. In this way the excited community are constantly solicited to concentrate around some new centre of union ; and all classes, not excepting even women and children, find themselves almost unwittingly embodied in a variety of combinations, whose objects, if not entirely reprehensible, are frequently of less consequence than their interested advocates are accustomed to represent.

Thus an important principle is liable to become ridiculous, and, by passing into disrepute, to lose its power ; and if the good sense of the community does not interpose a check to this egregious abuse, the day is at hand when its real advantages will be disesteemed, if not discarded. A few large and wisely constructed Associations formed around general principles, with each its circle of subordinates or auxiliaries, constituting mediums of fraternal communication, and opening channels for the accumulation of needful resources, can neither fail of salutary influence, nor render the mode of action despicable in public estimation. They serve as bonds of union among elements that would otherwise remain disjoined and alienated, and often accomplish objects which defy all other forms of instrumentality. But the multiplica-

tion of societies, at the present ratio, is essentially disorganizing, and tends only to derangement, and dissolution, and chaos. General objects are already divided and subdivided, and the process of subdivision is still proceeding with ominous rapidity. Almost every abstract conception has its advocates and antagonists, and around the affirmative and the negative they respectively cluster in distinct and often hostile organizations. Every form of evil, physical and moral, has, or soon will have, an affiliated foe sworn for its suppression; and more than one is already threatened by a double and even triple cohort of assailants, each rallied around some almost impalpable peculiarity of opinion respecting the mode of aggression, and each expending more strength in defence of its own way of doing a good thing, than in executing its ostensible purpose. The popular mass appears to be dismissing its proper affinities, and separating into diminished portions, that, by subdivision, are constantly becoming more diminutive; and the obvious tendency is to reduce the whole to distinct individuality. Thus we shall ultimately be thrown back upon first principles, and, after a season of chagrin and mortification, be compelled to dig deeper and lay anew the foundations of the social structure. In the mean time the shadow on the dial-plate of human improvement will have returned, not ten but twenty degrees, and the desired event of the world's enlightenment and regeneration, thrown remotely into the future, be visible only to the prophetic eye.

2. *There is danger lest the claims of Societies should interfere with prior and paramount obligations.*

Our benevolent Creator has established a variety of social and domestic relations, in addition to those which we sustain to himself; and until a man shall have fully recognized these relations, and made arrangements for the faithful performance of the duties thence resulting, he cannot, with im-

punity, assume new relations or pledge himself to new duties. If he neglect his family in any department of its claims, physical, intellectual, or moral, or omit the common and every day duties of justice and humanity, he will find it, not only at the bar of God, but even at the bar of his own conscience, an insufficient apology for delinquency, that he belonged to twenty societies, or was doing good on a large scale.

The appropriate business of children and youth is the cultivation of their minds, and the acquisition of useful knowledge preparatory to the activities of subsequent life. But if they become deeply interested in Voluntary Associations, and regard themselves as in duty bound to be the censors or the enlighteners of public sentiment, their minds will inevitably be diverted, and lose a relish for tranquil study; their interest in intellectual pursuits will suffer injurious diminution; and, by a premature appearance in the ranks of reformers, they will impose upon their future influence a most embarrassing interdict. A young man, not yet emerged from his minority, should remember that his primary obligation to himself, his friends, his country and his God, requires of him *preparation* rather than *action.* He cannot comply with the terms of membership in many Associations, and yet acquire the needful discipline to insure future eminence in any business or any profession. If a student, he may bear away a diploma, reluctantly bestowed, but he will find his affinity and his home with a class whose distinctive trait is superficiality.

> "Like buoys, that never sink into the flood,
> On Learning's surface they but lie and nod."

Let youth then apply themselves with the conviction that their present business is, not so much to enlighten others as to be enlightened—not to act upon the public mind, but to submit their own powers to patient, protracted discipline.

It is a question of considerable delicacy and of still greater importance, how far Woman may consistently engage in Voluntary Associations for the purpose of effecting popu ıar ends. The conditions of her being, as represented by both Nature and Revelation, would seem to indicate that HOME is her appropriate field of activity—a field generally extensive enough for the application of all her powers, however extraordinary, and when judiciously cultivated, sufficiently productive to reward her for all her toil and self-denial. *There*, in the language of Gray, she

"Redoubleth joys, and cutteth griefs asunder;"

there her influence acts the most beneficently upon the public welfare. Combinations of the gentler sex for the dispensation of household comforts among the destitute, such as the orphan and the widow, and also for mutual benefit by the enlargement of their own qualifications for usefulness in their respective circles, are surely not unsuitable. But beyond this limit very few exigencies will justify them in advancing; and beyond it undamaged modesty will generally be reluctant to proceed. The influence of woman is mightiest when she avoids publicity, and abstains from positions suited only to masculine occupancy. When therefore she engages in the bustle of daring enterprise, or mingles in the train of the vociferous agitator, she is in danger of overstepping the boundaries of feminine propriety, and, while emulous of reforming public opinion, of turning that public opinion against herself with an energy that shall wither up her influence in every department of society, and scorch its anathema indelibly into her reputation. Woman has power, and God forbid that she should be restricted in the legitimate use of it; but let her never misapply and waste it. Let her studious and active endeavor be to cultivate and exemplify the quiet virtues, to render home attractive, to tranquillize the turbulence of the rougher sex, to apply the soothing

emollient to the irritated vitals of the social system, and weave around the community the silken bonds of charity and concord.

In the artisan, the husbandman, the merchant, the physician, the counsellor, the love of wealth or of distinction may sometimes be sufficiently powerful to counteract the influence of these lateral currents; and, if not plied too violently by exciting agencies, they may hold on their way in the performance of their respective duties. But who has not seen even these classes stimulated almost to insanity, and lavishly surrendering time and energy to matters of doubtful expediency, greatly to the detriment of paramount interests? In the clerical profession it is certain that, from this source, injury, irreparable injury has resulted. Admitting that those societies, whose object is really and directly identical with that of the Christian ministry, must withdraw from the pulpit a few of the ablest for the management of their concerns, it does not follow that other associations, whose relation to Christianity is only incidental, should be allowed to claim the services of consecrated men who have professed to be "moved by the Holy Ghost" to preach the everlasting gospel, and upon whose heads the presbytery would never have laid hands, had it been anticipated that they would ever have prostituted their official influence to purposes of secondary consequence. And is it right, while upon every breeze there comes the wail of thousands of churches bemoaning the scarcity of ministers—is it right that so many, who have said, "Wo is unto me if I preach not the Gospel," should consent to become the executive officers and agents and lecturers of associations whose elements and aims are only subordinately religious? That the ends they seek are "moral" is not a sufficient apology; — are those ends evangelical, spiritual, Christ-like? But, omitting this aspect of the case, and regarding merely the influence of Voluntary Associations upon the character and usefulness of the ministry, the unprejudiced observer perceives, in every di-

rection, enough to awaken regret and apprehension. The mind is dissipated among too many objects; the standard of intellectual excellence is reduced; the platform is preferred to the pulpit; prudence and gravity are sacrificed to wit and drollery; public respect for the profession is diminished; the character, bereft of its sacredness, takes on the aspect of secularity; parochial service becomes insipid and irksome; and, as a consequence legitimate enough, the pastoral relation, measured not by life, nor yet by years, but by months, becomes a by-word for instability.

No impartial observer will deny that the multiplying associations of the day are absorbing more than their appropriate share of the public sympathy, and thus injuriously affecting important interests. Let any one duly estimate the amount of *time*, merely, that is annually expended in their meetings—in preliminary assemblages for consultation and stimulation—in drafting, adopting and amending constitutions—in the "free discussion" of disputable and indisputable doctrines—in the writing, reading and hearing of reports—in the preparing, pronouncing and applauding of speeches, and then say if it be heresy to declare that a large portion of this time might be more profitably employed, and that while the thoughtless are perpetrating this deplorable waste, duties of paramount urgency—duties to parents, duties to children, duties to creditors, duties to the church, are liable to be left unperformed.

3. *There is danger lest a spirit should be fostered unfavorable to the good order and comfort of society.*

The *spirit of party* is one of the disfiguring characteristics of the times. Very little is done or apparently can be accomplished, unless the object contemplated will commend itself to a party, enlist their feelings, and bear favorably upon their interests. Hardly can a press be sustained unless it will become the organ of a party, advocate all its

measures, and magnify all its victories. Institutions of learning, both literary and theological, are mainly dependant on party-zeal for sustentation, and seldom secure either friends or pupils, except as they show distinctly the partisan image and superscription. This evil, we have occasion to believe, is too often fostered and aggravated by the prevalent abuse of Voluntary Associations. A particular theory commends itself to a few as of primary importance, and promising, if practically applied, to achieve prodigies in the renovation of society. Others regard it as unimportant, or perhaps fallacious and fraught with mischief. To bring it before the community and press it upon public consideration, a society is organized, a party becomes pledged to sustain it, and the work of agitation is commenced. Another party adopt the antagonist principle, and form an association in self-defence. The friends of each commit themselves beyond the possibility of retraction, motives are impeached, hostility is engendered, passion is aroused, and scenes ensue derogatory to human dignity, and destructive of public harmony. So long as theories remain mere abstractions, they are comparatively harmless; but when they assume a practical form, and gather around them interested and determined advocates, they necessarily awaken opposition, and the spirit of party rages like a devouring fire.

Consequently there will be enkindled an exasperated *spirit of rivalry.* Occupying a field whose resources are limited, whatever is gained by one association is jealously regarded as lost or applied to objects of minor worthiness. Each esteeming its own claim as paramount, is tempted to exaggerate its importance, and to speak diminutively of its rival. Invidious comparisons are thus instituted, which vex and alienate, and strifes succeed, that deeply disturb the social tranquillity.

The legitimate product of this spirit of party, and spirit of jealous rivalry, is the *spirit of ferocious denunciation.* Those who favor one theory, or pledge their influence to

one combination, are denounced by the advocates of the other, in language uncourteous and often criminative. Such as have the moral courage to stand aloof from the acrid controversy are sneeringly stigmatized as "fence-men," "expediency-men, ' and, however conscientious their scruples, are allowed no quietude until driven from their neutrality, and forced into some notorious self-committal.

Such effects, it may be alleged, are not the natural or necessary fruits of Voluntary Associations. True, nor are riots and insurrections the legitimate fruits of republican institutions;—they result from the abuse of republican freedom. So the evils here described and deprecated are the product of that state of society which is induced by the extravagant tendency to recur to combinations as instruments of Power. They too frequently become the engines of party, and then the spirit which they foster is pre-eminently pernicious; and if no restraint be interposed, if no curative element be introduced, who can fail to apprehend disastrous results?

Let no one pronounce this a false alarm. The spirit of the age, goaded by the agencies of which I have spoken, is every year becoming more furious and unmanageable. It has already acquired a motion which we can see, and a momentum which we can feel, and, calculating the elements of the orbit in which it is moving, we may anticipate the point in its excentric course at which, unchecked, it must soon arrive.

4. *There is danger lest individual morality should suffer.*

It will readily be admitted that whatever contributes to reduce the authority or debilitate the energy of the individual conscience, is the occasion of indescribable injury. Such, it is not difficult to perceive, is the natural, the actual tendency of Voluntary Associations.

Combinations do not ordinarily consider themselves as under the same moral laws as bind individuals. Consequently men will do things, when associated with others, of which, as individuals, they would shudder to be guilty. Two or three men in partnership will do violence to the plainest principles of justice and humanity, because they imagine the responsibility to be divided, when each by himself would not have ventured a departure from the strictest rectitude. Hence the rigor of our legislative enactments for the regulation of partnerships. No one doubts that corporate bodies often adopt a standard of morality far different from that which the corporators make the rule of their individual conduct. One man, when tempted to misdeeds, feels the whole pressure of responsibility, and, though destitute of principle, shrinks from the dreaded frown of public opinion ;—let a few others join him, and he will proceed, in defiance of the odium. "The multitude never blush." Five hundred men will demolish a printing-press—perhaps shoot down an editor, and justify it as patriotic, while neither of them would do it alone, even if he could with impunity, because, as the act of an individual, it would be both mean and criminal. A judge in Missouri has lately given utterance, from the bench, to the pestiferous and cut-throat sentiment, that the most villainous deed, if perpetrated by "the many," is essentially different in moral turpitude from the same deed performed by "the few," and comes not under the cognizance of the grand jury. The inference is sufficiently obvious, that violence by a multitude, however disastrous to property and life, involves only a slight degree of individual guiltiness. May we and our children's children go down to the dust and be forgotten, before such doctrine shall find a place in the land of the pilgrims.

This fallacy in vulgar ethics is unquestionably one source of the delusion that has so long perverted the human conscience respecting the immorality of War. Although, in national contests, every law of God, and every right of man

is violated, and an amount of happiness transcending computation is ruthlessly destroyed, yet no one concerned, if he obey the military code, imagines that he is individually criminal. The responsibility is considered as resting upon the whole, but applying to none of the parts. Strip from war this iniquitous delusion, and fix responsibility where infinite Equity will ultimately fasten it, and the blessings of peace will soon become universal and perpetual.

All national crimes are committed under the convenient shelter of the same egregious fallacy. That abstract thing, the nation, as devoid of conscience as of purity, is regarded as accountable for the wrong, while all the individuals composing the nation congratulate themselves as guiltless.

A rational morality would teach us that although a combination consists of parts, yet the guilt of a wrong perpetuated by the body moving in concert, attaches undivided and entire to each of the confederates. But it is not thus that men are accustomed to think; and, as an acute writer justly remarks, they seldom rise from a table of iniquitous consultation, calculating that their share of the advantage anticipated is to be the measure of their share of the blame. The history of the Church, as well as common history, abundantly illustrates this sort of casuistry; nor can we at all reconcile the proceedings of ecclesiastical bodies with the personal reputation of the individuals who acted in them, without frequent reference to the fallacy under consideration. The saints were saints in cloister, but not in conclave.*

Here we detect a peculiar danger attendant on Voluntary Associations. Men inconsiderately merge their individuality in the mass, and, by adopting a reduced standard of morality, lose their keen sense of right and wrong. Conscience is bereft of its discriminating edge, and proportionally enervated in its impulsive energy. In this way, para-

* Spiritual Despotism, by Isaac Taylor.

doxical as it may appear, those very Associations whose express design is to suppress vice and elevate the tone of public morals, may have reflex tendencies unfavorable to the general result intended. While laboring to promote the public good in one quarter, they are too often undermining it in another.

Thousands persuade themselves that they are benevolent, because attached to Societies which are successfully engaged in meliorating human condition, while their own share in the benevolent activity is nearly a non-entity. Thus, while the evil done by an Association is charged to the responsibility of an abstraction, not a free agent, and no compunction is felt—for the multitude never repents any more than it blushes—all the good achieved is regarded as done by the living actors, and therefore becomes the occasion of individual self-complacency. It would perhaps be difficult to determine which aspect of this double fallacy is most pernicious to practical morality.

The operation of this evil may be seen especially in our cities, where great and growing demands are made upon the benevolent for the relief of physical suffering. The time was when those who had bounty to bestow made personal investigation of the wants of the needy, and with their own hands dispensed their benefactions. In this way there was direct intercourse between the rich and the poor, and while the sympathies of the former were kept alive and active, the gratitude of the latter had a known and definite object. The moral influence of such intercourse was reciprocally salutary. Now the beneficence of the public runs mainly through the treasuries of charitable associations. A few are made the almoners of the many, and thus the rich and the poor are kept widely asunder,—the former paying their subscriptions, not knowing who is to be benefited—the latter receiving donations, grateful perhaps to the Society in general, but to no person in particular. Such is the state of the community, such the eagerness after wealth, such the

parsimony of time and personal effort, that perhaps the only alternative is to tolerate the present plan, and allow the multitude to be benevolent by proxy; but the evils of such an arrangement are numerous, and are every year increasing. It is deserving of serious inquiry whether the tendency is not to widen the breach between the rich and the poor—whether this mode of giving and receiving does not injuriously affect the moral feelings of both classes—whether pauperism is not encouraged and increased—and whether the entire system does not require revision and essential modification. Is not a large amount that is now contributed paid for the privilege of exemption from personal visitation? Does not the publicity which is given to the generosity of donors, present unworthy inducements to liberality? Is it suited to the great design of the Sabbath to employ so many of its holy hours in the exhibition of the claims of societies, and the soliciting of pecuniary contributions? And are the benefactions bestowed upon the needy through the medium of associations, welcomed as gratuities coming fresh from sympathizing hearts?

These suggestions are thrown out for the purpose of awakening your attention to the philosophy of the whole subject. No considerate man would denounce the entire system because of incidental evils, provided those evils can be avoided, and all the excellencies of the system retained. There must be channels for the circulation of the streams of benevolence; but it is a momentous question, whether, in a large proportion of cases, individual is not preferable to associated action.

Another effect of Voluntary Associations, detrimental to individual morality, results from the unconditional surrender of the conscience to the keeping of irresponsible masters. Personal independence is crippled, and the inward man is subjected to a species of control not far removed from despotism. It is indeed a despotism of all kinds the most odious and execrable—the despotism of the majority. A

combination once formed, each of the constituents is considered as pledged to support all its measures, and co-operate with all its agents, and any reluctance to run parallel with men or measures, is too often visited with a volley of denunciation, enough to intimidate any thing but iron hardihood. Come what will, you must consent to go with the party, or be anathematized as a renegade. If once you enter the car in any particular train, you must proceed at the pleasure of the engineer, or peril limb and life in the attempt to escape.

In such circumstances, is there no danger lest individuality should be sacrificed, the sense of personal responsibility diminished, conscience ensnared, and morality irreparably injured?

Having thus designated certain perils attendant on a leading principle of the times, it may be considered as incumbent on me to specify the appropriate safeguards. For every evil there is undoubtedly a remedy; but the discovery of the former is often easier than a prescription of the latter; and it is generally less difficult to prescribe the suitable remedy, than to secure compliance with the necessary conditions. The present delirium of the social system interposes an obstacle of most disheartening aspect, and little can be done but to wait patiently until the paroxysm subsides, and nature resumes her wonted channels. Yet, in a congregation like this, comparatively unfrenzied and tranquil, a few suggestions will surely be appreciated.

1. Discard at once the quackery that Voluntary Associations are in all cases the best means for the accomplishing of moral ends. As instruments of power, they are of incalculable importance, and for many purposes, and within certain limits, they combine peculiar and indispensable advantages. The most fastidious must admit the necessity of some associations; and the denial of their utility, or the

failure to employ them in beneficent enterprises, would be both unwise and culpable. Infinite Wisdom, in the Ecclesiastical organization, has sanctioned the principle, and exhibited its healthful efficiency. But because some evils may be suppressed, and some benevolent objects attained by recourse to this principle, no intelligent reasoner would thence conclude that this is the only, or even the best mode of removing every vice, or nurturing every virtue. Its universal application is moral empiricism, as destructive in operation as it is fallacious in theory.

2. Let no man, who would not unnecessarily jeopard his influence and ensnare his moral feelings, unite with an organization whose object he does not both understand and approve. It is melancholy to perceive how inconsiderately the multitude will huddle their names and influence into associations, whose purposes are equivocally designated, or, if distinctly specified, are either unimportant, or decidedly objectionable. Bring the question to the bar of an enlightened understanding and an unbiassed conscience, and as an accountable being, answer:—Is this society needed? Cannot its object be as well secured by individual effort? Is the object good and practicable? Is the plan of action judicious? Does it need and deserve my co-operation? Experience will prove that it is easier, by deliberate precaution, to avoid a snare, than to extricate one's self when deeply entangled.

3. Let every man be resolute enough, irrespective of consequences, to disengage himself from an association, secular or religious, that transcends its delegated powers, and pursues objects, or advocates doctrines, or adopts measures which were not embraced in the original design, and for which he cannot conscientiously be responsible. What consideration in the universe should induce a consent to what we believe to be wrong? A conscience unperverted, undamaged, is to

be preferred to the applauses of a million. Better endure for a brief period the suspicions and even denunciations of the on-rushing crowd of mono-maniacs, than to surrender moral freedom, or suffer conscience to put on the trammels of party. Better sacrifice any thing else—better die than part with the independence of the soul.

4. Cultivate individuality. Responsibility attaches to us as individuals, and no modification of external circumstances can release us from the unalterable decree that "Every one of us shall give account of *himself*." It is therefore incumbent upon every man, in view of his higher relations, to be "wise for *himself*," and to allow nothing to interfere with the assiduous cultivation of individual character. Relative worth may ordinarily be gauged by personal worth; and no man's real excellence derives the least additional value from any associated considerations. Because society in general is improving, let him not delude himself with the idea that he is necessarily a partaker of that improvement. There is no "march of mind," except the marching of individual minds. The "benevolence of the age" is only the aggregate of individual benevolence. Let a man, then, faithfully maintain the independence of his own understanding, and the simplicity and purity of his own conscience, and learn to stand erect and steadfast upon the moveless foundation of individual merit; and he will not only preserve himself from drifting with every popular current, but supply a stable shelter, under whose lee inferior minds may moor themselves till tranquillity returns.

But let us not despair of the Republic. Fearfully ominous, as, in several particulars, may be the aspect of the times, yet all is not gloom. In the moral horizon, amidst much that justifies apprehension, and summons to increasing vigilance, there are some indications, and those on the very face of the hurricane, that

"————like the rainbow,
Announce the bursting splendors of the sun;"

and it ill becomes us to bode only evil, or yield ourselves to hopeless despondency. Heaven and earth are indeed shaken with unaccustomed convulsions; but there are some things which cannot be shaken, and they will remain, unquestioned principles, the stable basis of intelligent confidence, when all that is mutable shall have passed forever away. "The things which are not seen are eternal." The beneficent Creator has fixed boundaries to human excitements, and wrought into the social organization such recuperative principles as encourage the hope that the upheavings which now threaten the foundations of society, will ultimately terminate from pure exhaustion, and be succeeded by a reproduction of purer and nobler elements, "a new heaven and a new earth."

While then we admonish of peril, let it not be imagined that we despair of the perfect triumph of right and wrong, truth over error, principle over prejudice. Sanative ingredients have long since been cast by the hand of infinite Benignity into this troubled sea of mind, and when the agitation shall subside, we are authorized to anticipate that it will crystallize in forms of unearthly splendor around the cross of Christ.